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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 002189

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/14/2015

TAGS: [TU](#) [AM](#) [PERL](#)

SUBJECT: TURKISH PARLIAMENT PRESSES ANTI-ARMENIAN GENOCIDE CAMPAIGN

REF: ANKARA 1841

(U) Classified by Political Counselor John Kunstadter, E.O. 12958, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

1. (C) Summary: The Turkish Parliament is pressing its campaign to tell the international community that there was no Armenian genocide. PM Erdogan has sent a letter to Armenian President Kocharian asking that Armenian scholars participate in a joint Turkish/Armenian historical research project that the Turks believe will exonerate them. The Turkish Parliament and public are prepared for no other result. End Summary.

#### Parliament Presses Turkey's Case

2. (U) Turkey's Parliament is pressing its campaign launched in March to counter claims of Armenian genocide (reftel). On April 13, PM Erdogan, FM Gul, and chief opposition party CHP leader Baykal attended a session of Parliament to "debate" the issue. The result was not a debate, but instead, speeches in which Gul and CHP MP (and former Ambassador to the U.S.) Sukru Elekdag vied to outdo each other in denying Turkish wrongdoing. Noting calls for Turkey to make peace with its history, Gul summarily trumpeted, "Turkey is at peace with its history."

3. (U) Gul announced Turkey is sending a letter to Armenian President Kocharian requesting Armenian scholars participate in a proposed joint historical research project which the Turks say will show there was no genocide. Gul called for the Turkish government, bureaucracy, NGOs and press to participate in the "national cause" to make the truth known.

#### A Selective Historical Approach

4. (U) Turkish Historical Society President Yusuf Halacoglu has begun a series of university lectures across Turkey presenting Turkey's historical argument. Using selected documents, Halacoglu emphasizes Armenian anti-Ottoman activities in World War I; portrays as inflated claims of Armenian deaths, most of which he says were due to disease, not deliberate killing; and highlights Ottoman efforts to ameliorate the effects of Armenian deportations. When Halacoglu made his presentation at Ankara's Cankaya University on April 11, most "questions" from the audience were expressions of outrage that Turkey could be blamed for any wrongdoing.

5. (U) Also on April 13, the Turkish General Staff announced it would publish selected documents about Armenian activity between 1914 and 1918. According to press reports, the TGS will publish them in four volumes.

#### An International Campaign Tailored for a Domestic Audience

6. (C) The Turkish campaign is ostensibly aimed at international audiences but seems paradoxically tailored to appeal to domestic audiences. The government is not preparing the Turkish public for concessions. Publicly, there is no mention that an objective historical approach could do anything but totally exonerate Turkey. One AKP MP who claimed to have thoroughly researched the Armenian question seemed stumped when we asked him what would happen if objective research led to a contrary result. After several seconds' hesitation, all he could say was that would not be acceptable.

#### No Comprehensive Approach

7. (C) There is no sign of a comprehensive approach to Turkey's Armenia problem. The MFA office charged with monitoring Armenian genocide allegations is part of the MFA's Security Affairs Directorate; the office in charge in Armenia is in the Caucasus regional bureau. Our MFA contacts in the regional bureau have stoutly resisted our advice that improved relations with Armenia could dampen the drive for a genocide resolution. Security Affairs Department Head Arda concedes that improved bilateral relations would give him ammunition against the drive for genocide resolutions, but his functional bureau has little clout.

18. (C) We see no change to Turkey's Armenia policy on the horizon: in his April 13 Parliament speech, FM Gul reiterated that Armenian concessions on occupied territory, recognition of the border and dropping the genocide resolution campaign were sine qua nons to restoring diplomatic relations and open borders.

19. (C) The AKP government and Gul's MFA appear to have been taken by surprise by the campaign, which originated with the opposition CHP. Arda speculated that AKP joined in out of concern that otherwise CHP would get the political upper hand; the MFA was only brought into the process thereafter.

EDELMAN